

81 MAR 1977

STATINTL

James J. Kilpatrick

# Illegitimus Non Carborundum

Washington.

The best-known Knight in Washington, unlike the paragon of Chaucer's tale, may be "verray parfit" but she is not the least bit "gentil." Miss Frances Knight, director of the United States Passport Office for 16 years, is a hard-boiled egg, well seasoned with salt and pepper, and she is an absolute delight.

This weekend finds Miss Knight in Florida with her millionaire husband, publisher Wayne Parrish, putting around the retirement home they have in mind at Hobe Sound. The prospect that the lady may even be contemplating retirement will gladden a few hearts in the State Department and on the Hill, but it will depress the legions of Miss Knight's admirers. One

is inclined to encourage an outpouring of letters to Frances: "Say it isn't so."

She was in a low when I lunched with her a few days ago, and this was sadly out of character. Ordinarily she flies as high as a flag on a windy day. An attack in the New York Times had her spirits drooping, but her foes should not be too encouraged. By the time she got back to her office, she was in full fighting form.

The Times was giving her a hard time for its belated discovery last month that "Passport Office Has Secret Files." The gist of the story was that Miss Knight's office maintains what is known as a "lookout file" comprising 243,000 names. To the Times this was "Raw Material for Snoopers."

In point of fact, the lookout file is not new. It has been maintained, in one form or another, for many years. Its existence never has been a secret; and until the Times began heaving and howling, about the only public criticism had come from the Warren Commission on the assassination of John Kennedy. In the matter of Lee Oswald, said the commission, the system was "obviously deficient."

In the maintenance of this common-sense lookout, the Passport Office functions in an administrative capacity only: It places a flag on names sent to it by the courts, FBI, CIA and Secret Service, and when one of the names turns up on a passport application, that fact is reported to the agency concerned. The Passport Office maintains no dossiers, undertakes no surveillance and routinely issues passports unless it finds compelling reason not to.

Many of the names in the lookout file have been inserted

by the FBI as "known or suspected Communists or subversives." This troubles the New York Times, which cherishes the breathless illusion that all men must be considered innocent until proved guilty in court, but it will not trouble persons who live in the real world. Of course law enforcement agencies must keep an eye on suspects; they would be derelict if they didn't.

The lookout file also contains names of persons whose U.S. citizenship is doubtful. The list embraces fugitives from justice, draft dodgers and those sought by courts for desertion or failure to maintain child custody. Still another category takes in persons who have threatened the life of the President.

The Times and the lookout file are the least of Miss Knight's troubles. Her office is struggling to maintain its outstanding performance record against a formidable increase in foreign travel. Last year saw two million passports issued; the number will be much larger this year.

But it is the sheer obsidian nature of bureaucracy that is beginning to get to her. Miss Knight finds herself arrayed, much of the time, against her superiors in the State Department. She is pelted with memoranda from her boss. She has proposed some bold innovations in the whole business of issuing passports, but she is getting nowhere with them. A deserved raise in grade and pay, long overdue, still is denied her. But quit? Not yet. Over her desk is a familiar Latin motto. Loosely translated, it reads, "Don't let the bastards grind you down." It's great advice for a doughty Knight whose armor gets more battered all the time.